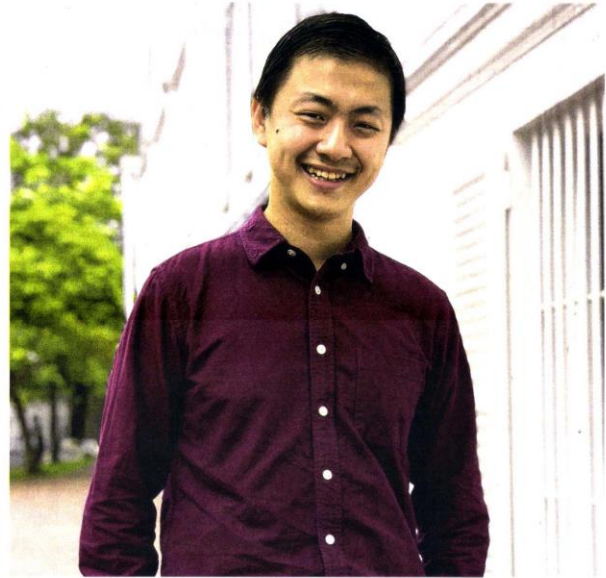


Mr Mock Yi Jun, 20, has met ambassadors from Asia and the United States at youth leader conventions, attended United Nations youth forums, and organised webinars on environmental sustainability. PHOTO: COURTESY OF MOCK YI JUN



Mr Oon Tian Sern, 25, was inspired by his own experiences to start an online portal on mental health issues. Mr Oon, who is an only child, said he spent his teenage years without someone to share his anxieties with. ST PHOTO: DAVID TAY

Singaporean duo win British award for young leaders

They are among 61 winners who will receive the award from Queen Elizabeth

David Tay

Two young Singaporeans have been named winners of the fourth and final Queen's Young Leaders Award.

They join the ranks of a roughly 240-strong network of outstanding youth recognised by Queen Elizabeth II for stepping up to transform the lives of others in their communities.

The duo are Mr Mock Yi Jun, 20, a second-year politics and international relations student at The London School of Economics and Political Science, and Mr Oon Tian Sern, 25, founder and chief executive of Acceset, a social enterprise online portal for people to discuss mental health issues and seek help anonymously.

They are among 61 outstanding young people aged between 18 and 29 from Commonwealth countries, who were chosen from more than 2,000 applicants.

Mr Oon was inspired to set up his mental health network by his own experiences.

Throughout his school years, he relied on bursaries and needs-based scholarships for his school expenses. His father, a department

store salesman, and mother, a part-time cleaner, had little left after paying for basic household necessities. The only child's greatest regret was spending his teenage years without someone to share his anxieties with.

"I felt embarrassed talking to my friends about my inferiority complex. Everyone else seemed to have better access to people and resources that allowed them to succeed, but not me. At home, my parents were not the communicative sort as well."

Upon completing his studies at Singapore Management University (SMU) in March last year, he used about \$10,000 from his savings – meant to repay his university student loan – and a \$10,000 grant from the Community Leaders Forum Projects Fund, a seed grant that supports innovative projects by young people, to start Acceset.

He added: "Based on a 2011 study by the Institute of Mental Health, it takes on average four to six years for someone with depression to seek professional help, and only one in five do so... Something can be done for those who need help to be able to easily access resources, talk about their problems and seek

help with dignity." Mr Oon's fledgling project, now into its 10th month, is still not yet profitable. He works as a freelance cardiopulmonary resuscitation instructor, while developing the online portal and training volunteers in consultation with clinical psychologists.

People who know Mr Oon felt the award was a deserving recognition of his conviction and dedication to his work.

Assistant Professor Millie Yun Su, an SMU lecturer who taught Mr Oon in her entrepreneurship class, said: "Tian Sern is observant and critical about what he learns... He not only has these qualities but he is willing to take action to find solutions."

Mr Mock, on the other hand, has had opportunities laid at his door – which made him want to help others who need help to achieve their goals.

At just 20, the Public Service Commission (Foreign Service) scholar has met ambassadors from Asia and the United States at youth leader conventions, attended United Nations youth forums, and organised webinars on environmental sustainability for an international youth audience.

The youngest of three siblings

added that a supportive family gave him the freedom to pursue his goals and dreams.

His father, now retired, was the chief technology officer of StarHub and his mother, also retired, was a finance manager at Hewlett-Packard. His older sisters, aged 21 and 22, are undergraduates.

"I also had teachers who guided me and provided me with opportunities to learn about fields I was interested in. If I could help support those who might not have the guidance they need, I'd like to do my part," said the former Anglo-Chinese School (Independent) student.

While studying at ACS(I), Mr Mock, then 17, joined the National Youth Council's Young Change-Makers (YCM) programme.

There, he co-led monthly pitching sessions, where young people applied for grants to execute ideas that solve community-based issues.

Mr Muhammad Nabil, 29, who was co-chairman of YCM during Mr Mock's term, said: "Even during his examination period, he would continue to actively volunteer to mentor young people and advise them on their projects."

Mr Oon and Mr Mock will receive their awards from Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace in London in June. They will also attend a week-long residential programme there, where they will get to meet current and past recipients of the award.

Only two other Singaporeans have won the Queen's Young Leaders Award.

One of them is Ms Qin Yunquan, who was 28 when she was named a winner last year. She trains vulnerable groups of people, including abused women and the elderly, in the Israeli martial art Kapap. The other is Mr Mark Jin Quan Cheng, who was also 28 when he won the award in 2016. He is an environmentalist who started Green Xchange, a project that encourages seniors to recycle by allowing them to exchange recyclables for groceries.

davidtay@sph.com.sg

A HELPING HAND

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MR MOCK YI JUN, a second-year politics and international relations student at The London School of Economics and Political Science.

A LISTENING EAR

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MR OON TIAN SERN, founder and chief executive of Acceset, an online portal for people to discuss mental health issues and seek help anonymously.